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HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Equitable geographical distribution

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to submit to the members of the General Assembly his comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Comparison of methods of calculating equitable geographical distribution within the United Nations common system" (A/51/705).

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ANNEX

Comments of the Secretary-General on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Comparison of methods of calculating equitable geographical distribution within the United Nations common system"

I. GENERAL

1. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit shows an interesting approach to the concepts and principles adopted by Member States and embodied in the General Assembly resolutions and directives to the Secretary-General on the appointment of staff.

2. The question of geographical distribution in the United Nations Secretariat has been the subject of intense debate in the General Assembly since as early as 1947, when, at the second session, Member States expressed dissatisfaction with the geographical distribution of the staff in the Secretariat. The power of appointment vested in the Secretary-General by Article 101, paragraph 1, of the Charter of the United Nations has ever since been subject to the directives of the General Assembly. The guidance provided by Member States regarding equitable geographical distribution has included both very detailed policy guidelines on methods of calculation and broad principles underlying the efforts of the Secretariat aimed at implementing the mandates of the General Assembly. Among the principles underlying the current methodology for calculating equitable geographical distribution are broad agreements regarding the desirability of relating the base figure to the actual number of posts subject to geographical distribution; the inclusion of posts based on the population factor in the ranges allocated to Member States; and the need for flexibility upwards and downwards from the mid-point of each Member State's range. The General Assembly has also decided on the factors to be used and the weights to be given to each factor.

3. The General Assembly has therefore given specific goals to the Secretary-General. The Office of Human Resources Management has been consistently working with all major organizational units of the Secretariat to ensure equitable geographical distribution of the staff. Highly competent candidates can be found in all Member States, including those which are unrepresented or under-represented, assuming the effective cooperation of departments and offices with the Office and the provision of appropriate resources for search purposes. When the current freeze on recruitment is lifted, the Secretariat will continue to cooperate with Member States in identifying a wider range of qualified candidates through recruitment missions, the media, computerized networks and other search methods.

4. One of the latest special efforts by Member States to reach a consensus on a formula for the determination of equitable geographical representation in the Secretariat was an open-ended Working Group of the Fifth Committee that was convened pursuant to General Assembly resolution 47/226 of 8 April 1993. The Working Group held five meetings between 19 and 23 July 1993 and considered a working paper prepared by the Secretariat containing a comparative analysis of

the systems of geographical distribution followed by the Secretariat, the World Health Organization and the World Meteorological Organization. It is recalled that the Working Group was unable to reach agreement on specific conclusions and recommendations (A/C.5/48/45).

5. The Joint Inspection Unit report contains a detailed description of all methods used by various organizations of the United Nations common system to implement the principle of geographical distribution, emphasizing their universal nature. The Inspectors' analytical approach could have been supplemented by a discussion of the substantive advantages and drawbacks of each system, especially in terms of its applicability, the degree to which it attains the objectives set by Member States and a description of mechanisms, if any, to introduce corrective measures if warranted, as well as a cost-benefit analysis. The absence of such a discussion makes it more difficult for the decision-making bodies to come to a clear and soundly argued conclusion. Another drawback of the report is the lack of identical aggregate personnel information for the same reference period (unidentified for most tables provided in the report), which makes it difficult to cross-check the data and necessitates further explanation.

6. Against this background, the Secretary-General shares the conclusion of the Inspectors that "'audacious' ideas", as expressed in the report, should be the subject of general reflection, which may prepare the groundwork for further discussion and progress on the delicate matter of managing geographical distribution (A/51/705, p. 13). In the same vein, the Secretary-General would like to seek further guidance from the General Assembly on the various issues raised by the Inspectors in their report.

II. COMMENTS ON RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

7. Regarding the desirability of allocating on a fixed basis factors such as membership and contribution, the Secretary-General concurs with the Inspectors' emphasis on the importance of a system-wide coordination of efforts to implement the principle of geographical distribution.

8. Concerning the proposal by the Inspectors to give more active consideration to the demographic profile, the Secretary-General has noted in particular the recommendation to redistribute the weights of the various factors. It is recalled that currently 40 per cent of the posts reserved for geographical distribution are allocated in accordance with the membership factor, while 55 per cent of the posts apply to the contribution factor. The Secretary-General is of the view that consideration should be given to increasing the demographic factor, which currently accounts for only 5 per cent of the base figure of 2,700 geographical posts, to a level to be agreed upon by Member States. In an earlier report (A/C.5/46/2, para. 34), the Secretary-General pinpointed the main issue in the current methodology of distributing geographical posts, which is not the methodology itself, but rather the relative weights given to the various factors. In the same report a wide range of options was offered to Member States, with a view to modifying the current weights of the factors. None of the options proposed was acceptable to all

Member States. In fact, it can be observed that in the past there was little likelihood that a revision of the weight attached to each factor would find its way into a General Assembly resolution, because no consensus was expressed in favour of such an idea.

9. With regard to the proposed emphasis on regional and subregional grouping, the Secretary-General notes that previous attempts to apply a formula based on regional or subregional groupings have not been successful. Furthermore, representation by regions would in itself not solve the problem of country representation within each region. Those observations notwithstanding, if Member States were to devise such a regional or subregional formula for geographical distribution, the Secretary-General would make every effort to apply it as closely as possible, on either a regional or a subregional basis, as decided by Member States.

10. The Secretary-General supports the recommendation that high-level managerial posts should be distributed equally among the geographical regions of the world. Regrettably, the Inspectors do not appear to recognize the long-term efforts made by every Secretary-General towards achievement of that goal.

Recommendation 2

11. Through their interventions in the Fifth Committee, representatives of Member States and every Secretary-General have emphasized that the Secretary-General's hands should not be tied by a rigid mathematical formula for the appointment of staff in the Secretariat. It is appropriate to recall that even with the adoption of the current ranges, which allow flexibility of plus and minus 15 per cent from the mid-point in determining the upper and lower limits of a particular desirable range, a number of Member States have been advocating a less rigid system than the current one.

12. In addition to being flexible, any new system of desirable ranges should meet a number of operational requirements; such a system, inter alia, should produce predictable and verifiable results, be easy to administer and be transparent.

13. The proposals made by Inspectors regarding the introduction of a new post-weighting principle should be examined at both the technical and political levels, as changing the existing methodology would involve far-reaching modifications in the system of quotas and desirable ranges.

14. Currently, each Member State is allocated a quota calculated by taking into consideration three factors and specifying a certain number of posts at mid-point and at the upper and lower ranges. The drawback of the current system, as pointed out by the Inspectors, is that under such a system the levels of the posts have been regarded as equivalent.

15. From the report, it is not clear what new methodology the Inspectors would propose to implement the post-weighting principle. It would appear that several options have been contemplated, including a system whereby each Member State would be allocated a number of posts at predetermined grade levels. Another system would involve a point-weighting methodology, apparently similar to the

currently used methodology but differing from it in that a number of points would be allocated to each Member State instead of a number of posts. Finally, a system was proposed whereby post-weighting methodology would be calculated via post salaries.

16. Without wishing to pre-empt the further examination of these proposals by the Member States at this early stage, especially in the absence of a concrete framework in which to implement them, the Secretary-General would like to make the following preliminary comments. First, any post-weighting principle adopted should not confront the Secretariat with a more rigid system that does not lend itself to practical implementation. This would seem to be the case if each Member State were to be allocated a number of posts at predetermined levels. Second, the point-weighting methodology, while appearing more flexible in that it would allow Member States to choose among various options involving the number and levels of posts within its point allocation, appears to be unpredictable in the long run, owing to frequent changes in grade levels of posts encumbered by the nationals of the various Member States. Furthermore, should a Member State opt for the greatest number of lower level posts, it would eventually become over-represented, even with the same number of posts, and no action appears to be possible to correct its over-representation. In addition, under such a system the quotas of Member States would have to be recalculated annually. The Secretary-General is unable, at this juncture, to offer any comments with regard to the system proposed by the Inspectors to implement the post-weighting principle via salaries, as sufficient details have not been provided in the report.

Recommendation 3

17. The Secretary-General fully supports the recommendation of the Joint Inspection Unit that voluntary contributions from Member States should not be accompanied by pressure or stipulation regarding the recruitment of nationals of a particular country or region. While the Secretariat should be fully accountable to donors for the use of their voluntary contributions, it will continue to negotiate with them concerning the implementation of projects and programmes financed out of such resources by personnel identified and appointed by the Secretariat after appropriate verification of qualifications.

Recommendation 4

18. With regard to gratis personnel, the Secretary-General wishes to refer to his report on the subject (A/51/688 and Corr.1), which extensively examined the issues raised by the Inspectors. In it, the Secretary-General clearly stated the position of the Secretariat regarding the functions and tasks that would normally be assigned to gratis personnel, as well as the specific circumstances in which gratis personnel may be appointed. Those positions were summarized in paragraphs 41 to 50 and 67 to 69 of that report, as well as in annex I, which provided guidelines for the acceptance of gratis personnel.

19. More specifically, with regard to concerns expressed by the Inspectors, the Secretary-General proposes to follow the policy whereby gratis personnel would not be used to fill posts or discharge functions normally authorized under the regular programme budget, the peacekeeping budget or the peacekeeping support

account, especially with respect to political, legal and administrative functions. Under no circumstances should gratis personnel be allowed to supervise staff members in the exercise of their official duties, nor should they be assigned functions that are of a sensitive or confidential nature. The Secretary-General's report concluded that gratis personnel should be accepted on an exceptional basis, for a defined, limited period of time and in accordance with guidelines that preserve and protect the international character of the Organization (ibid., para. 69).

Recommendation 5

20. This recommendation is of particular interest to smaller organizations of the common system. In a number of organizations, such as the International Civil Service Commission, the United Nations University and the United Nations Pension Fund, human resources are administered in accordance with the Staff Rules of the United Nations. Accordingly, the following comments are limited to those aspects that affect the interaction of the United Nations Secretariat with those organizations.

21. The Secretary-General agrees with concerns expressed by the Inspectors and welcomes in principle the ideas put forward by them in this recommendation, which offers a measurable yardstick for implementation of the principle of geographical distribution in smaller organizations. However, it would appear that there may be some impediments to its translation into practice: not only do many staff members in smaller organizations have permanent appointments, but, under General Assembly resolution 37/126, staff members with a fixed-term appointment are entitled to consideration for a career appointment after five years of continuous good service, as explained in the report of the Secretary-General on the ration between career and fixed-term appointments (A/C.5/51/34).